

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK STRESS LEVEL AND PARENTING STYLES AMONG WORKING MOTHERS IN KLANG VALLEY**

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### **Abstract**

Working mothers are becoming more common in Malaysia, and they are expected to balance work and family obligations, which can lead to role conflict. Therefore, work stress will impact their well-being which influences their parenting style. This study aims to determine the relationship between work stress and parenting styles among working mothers in the Klang Valley. This research used the quantitative method, utilizing the Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ) and the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ). The research was conducted among 262 working mothers in Klang Valley. Using Spearman's rank correlation analysis, this study discovered that there is no relationship between work stress levels and parenting styles among working mothers. Therefore, work stress levels do not impact parenting styles. Results also showed that there were few differences in work stress levels and parenting styles based on employment status.

*Keywords: Working mothers, Work stress, Parenting style*

## INTRODUCTION

Due to gender stereotypes, a mother is often seen as a person who nurtures a child, cooks, etc. Meanwhile, a father is seen as a person who works for the family. However, in this modern era, the number of working mothers is increasing in society. Sabil and Marican (as cited in Yusuf & Chee, 2016) stated that Malaysian women comprise fifty percent (50%) of the labour force and seventy percent (70%) of them are married women who are working. Furthermore, mothers are also working to support their families and provide their children's education during the tough economy. Moreover, according to Yusuf and Chee (2016), working mothers are expected to be good and caring mothers in bringing up their kids at home. Meanwhile, at work, they are required to show high commitment and work harder. This shows that there will be a role conflict for the mother where she is unable to adapt and cope with her commitments at work and home well. Therefore, this problem will lead them to experience stress at the workplace. Slowly, if there is not a balance between work and life, they will start to show their work stress through parenting.

Work stress is the feeling of stress that is caused by their job task or environmental factors that make them feel difficult and pressured in order to focus and complete their work. Hurrell and colleagues (as cited in Holmstrom, 2008) stated that a study has proved the connection between increased stress levels and negative impacts on workers' well-being, performance, and health. This shows that if mothers are stressed at work due to the pressure, workload, environment, and deadline, they will be unable to focus on their job and perform well. Then, nurturing a child is not an easy task for parents either, as it requires parenting skills to raise them. Meanwhile, parenting style is the method of parenting a child used by parents. Parenting style is used to nurture their children's ability to interact with others, reflecting their social development.

In addition, past studies have discovered that work stress has a negative effect on a person's health (Fatemeh, 2020). Thus, if this stress constantly occurs, it will cause working mothers to affect their mental well-being; develop psychological disorders or suffer from illness. This will lead them to be unable to perform well at the workplace as their cognitive ability is impacted. As a result, there is a need for this study to be conducted, as it helps organizations identify working mothers' stress levels in order to increase their performance as their mental well-being is retained. Another factor contributing to the work stress experienced by working mothers is that they are unable to balance work and family life. As a result, this stress will be brought into the family context and could be transmitted through their parenting style. Using any parenting style will affect their children positively or negatively. Thus, this study is important to raise awareness among working mothers regarding the importance and outcome of parenting style. Moreover, if these mothers engage in negative parenting styles, it will affect their children's social development. If they are stressed and use an authoritarian style, they may resort to physical punishment when nurturing their children. Consequently, it will have an impact on their children's mental health and lead to the development of psychological illnesses. Working women must therefore understand how crucial it is to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives. In addition, if this study had not been done, the company might not be aware of the stress level of its workers (working mothers). In the long run, it will gradually affect their mental health. Plus, if the person constantly experiences work stress, they are prone to suffering from burnout. Scott (2020) mentioned that people who struggle to deal with their job stress might expose themselves to a high probability of having burnout. Burnout will eventually cause working mothers to leave their positions. As a result, the organization will experience more turnover, and the cost of hiring new employees will increase for the company.

In Malaysia, some researchers did focus on working mothers, but they studied the relationship between parenting satisfaction and parenting style. Since, there is a lack of research on the relationship between work stress and parenting style among working mothers, this research should be conducted to discover the findings. Therefore, this study aims to identify the relationship between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in Klang Valley.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research aims to determine the work stress level of working mothers in Klang Valley in terms of their employment status. A study in India by Rajgariah et al. (2021) aimed to determine and differentiate parenting stress among non-working and working mothers and to evaluate the connection of demographic information with parenting stress between working and non-working mothers. The results showed that 26% of working mothers and 13% of non-working mothers scored high in parental stress, proving a significant difference between those two groups (Rajgariah et al., 2021). As for the other objective, there was no statistical connection between parental stress scores and their demographic information, such as age, age during marriage, age during first childbirth, education, number of children, birth spacing, type of family, and residence (Rajgariah et al., 2021). Next, research was conducted in Indonesia by Pangaribuan (2021), which aimed to examine the connection between parenting style and stress for parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study showed that based on the demographic information, 30% of parents with senior high school level education scored a mild level of stress, and 20% scored a moderate level of stress (Pangaribuan, 2021). Then, in terms of employment status, 33% of parents from private organizations scored a mild level of stress, while 33% from government organizations scored a moderate level of stress (Pangaribuan, 2021). This study is also aimed to find out the working mothers' parenting style in Klang Valley in terms of their employment status. This research's results showed that 82.5% of parents were using democratic style, 10% were using authoritarian style, and 7.5% were using permissive style (Pangaribuan, 2021). Then, based on the demographic information, 100% of parents who are from the government sector were using democratic parenting style (Pangaribuan, 2021). Meanwhile, 66.7% from the private sector were using democratic and 33.3% of them were authoritarian (Pangaribuan, 2021).

This study is also intended to identify the relationship between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in Klang Valley. Then, in Serbia, Matejevic and Dordevic (2019) conducted research to discuss the relationship between parenting style and the scope of the problem between business and parental roles. The results of this study showed that parents who have more problems with parental and business roles are using authoritarian and permissive styles (Matejevic & Dordevic, 2019). Meanwhile, work's positive impact is related to using an authoritative style. This shows that there is a relationship between parenting style and the conflicting roles of working and parenting (Matejevic & Dordevic, 2019). However, a contrasting result by Pangaribuan (2021) was shown. According to Pangaribuan (2021), the results showed that there are no significant connections between parenting style and parental stress in Bojongsari, Depok ( $p = 0.92$ ).

## **METHODS**

This study's research design is quantitative, and a questionnaire was used to gather the data. As the goal of this study is to discover the association between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in the Klang Valley, this design has been adopted to test the

hypothesis of the study. Purposive sampling was employed in this study to collect the data from the sample. The questionnaire was distributed to the target population (working mothers in the Klang Valley), with certain requirements that needed to be met. Using Raosoft software, the intended sample size for this research is 256. The criteria to participate in this study are the following:

- must be a mother
- must be working in Klang Valley (Federal territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Selangor)
- Have at least a child of the age 0-17 years old

After identifying the potential respondents, a link to the Google Form survey was shared through WhatsApp with each respondent. Respondents were instructed to click on the provided link and complete the survey directly on their devices within a specified time frame. Out of all the invitations, 262 participants responded and agreed to take part in the research. The respondents that do not fit the criteria were removed, and the data will then be analysed using SPSS to help interpret the findings.

The instrument for this study is based on two existing questionnaires. The first source was the Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ) by Holmgren et al. (2009), where 14 questions were adapted and 7 were adopted in Section B. The items help to determine the work stress level for working mothers. The scale used for Section B is a 4-likert scale (1 = not stressful, 2 = less stressful, 3 = stressful, and 4 = very stressful) and a four-point scale ("Yes, always", "Yes, rather often", "No, seldom," and "No, never"). Then, Section C consisted of 32 items adopted from the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) by Robinson et al. (2001), which aimed to find out working mothers' parenting styles. The scale used for Section C is a 5-likert scale (1 = never, 2 = once in a while, 3 = about half of the time, 4 = very often, 5 = always). There are 56 items, and it requires 15 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

## RESULT

The purpose of the study was to identify the relationship between work stress and parenting styles among working mothers in the Klang Valley. The results were presented in two sections. First, the analysis of the level of work stress and the parenting styles based on employment status and followed by relationship between work stress level and parenting Styles.

### The Number of Participants Based on Employment Status

**Table 1:** The number of participants based on employment status

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Government	71	27
Private	130	49.4
Self-employed	62	23.6
	263	100

Table 1 shows the employment status of working mothers in Klang Valley. It shows that 49.4% of mothers are private sector employees, 27% are government sector employees, and 23.6% are self-employed. Therefore, most of the employees in this study are from the private sector.

## The Working Mother's Work Stress Level Based on Employment Status

**Table 2:** Cross-tabulation Analysis of Work Stress Level Based on Employment Status

		Work Stress Level		
		Low	Moderate	High
Employment status	Government	21.1	26.8	52.1
	Private	16.9	16.9	66.2
	Self-employed	21	27.4	51.6

The cross-tabulation analysis of work stress levels for working mothers in the Klang Valley was shown in Table 2 according to their employment status. It has been revealed that 51.6% of self-employed people, 52.1% of government workers, and 66.2% of private employees reported high levels of work stress. Therefore, the percentage of work stress across the three sectors is roughly the same. Mothers who work in the private sector did not experience less work-related stress. The level of work stress reported by mothers in the private sector is higher.

## The Working Mother's Parenting Styles Based on Employment Status

**Table 3:** Mean scores of parenting styles based on employment status

Employment status	Authoritative Parenting Styles		
	1	2	3
Government	5.6	8.5	85.9
Private	6.2	18.5	75.4
Self-employed	6.5	9.7	83.8

Employment status	Authoritarian Parenting Styles		
	1	2	3
Government	35.2	45.1	19.7
Private	66.1	13.8	20
Self-employed	74.2	12.9	12.9

Employment status	Authoritarian Parenting Styles		
	1	2	3
Government	46.4	36.6	16.9
Private	51.6	28.5	20
Self-employed	64.5	16.1	19.4

Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation analysis of parenting styles for working mothers in Klang Valley in terms of their employment status. It showed that 85.9% of government employees scored highly in authoritativeness, followed by 83.8% of self-employed people, and then 75.4%

of private employees. Apparently, most of the sectors scored high in authoritative parenting styles compared to authoritarian and permissive. The mothers from the government sector scored high in authoritative parenting style.

### **The Relationship Between Work Stress Level and Parenting Styles**

**Table 4:** Spearman’s rank correlation analysis between work stress level and parenting styles

	<b>Work Stress Level and Parenting Styles</b>		
	<b>Authoritative</b>	<b>Authoritarian</b>	<b>Permissive</b>
Correlation	-0.70	0.092	0.34
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.261	0.135	0.584

The Spearman’s rank correlation analysis between work stress level and parenting styles showed that there is no correlation between two variables: authoritative,  $r(261) = -.070$ ,  $p = .261$ ; authoritarian,  $r(261) = .092$ ,  $p = .135$ ; and permissive,  $r(261) = .034$ ,  $p = .584$ . Therefore, there is no relationship between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in Klang Valley. The summary of the results was presented in Table 4.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study found that most of the working mothers had a high level of work stress despite their employment status. In fact, mothers in the private sector scored higher levels of work stress. This result is unexpected, as Pangaribuan (2021) stated that most of the parents in the private sector have normal and low levels of parenting stress. Therefore, there are several factors causing high work stress among mothers, such as the fact that working mothers were not given work independence; were unappreciated; had confusing or high expectations of their job performance; had non-challenging work tasks; and had a stressful work environment. As supported, Gardazi et al., (2016) stated that based on their interview results, it was discovered that the factors contributing to burnout are having little or no work autonomy, receiving no acknowledgement or rewards for their effort, having no clarity or high expectations on the job; performing job tasks that are boring or without challenge, and performing duty in a stressful or chaotic situation. Another cause is that the working mothers were experiencing heavy workloads. As supported by Tripathi et al. (2016), the researcher discovered that mothers from the private sector are mostly experiencing heavy workloads at work, followed by mothers from the public sector and those who are self-employed.

Next, this study discovered that most working mothers used an authoritative parenting style despite their employment status. So, this study found that the mothers from the government sector scored highly in authoritative parenting style. Similar to this study, Pangaribuan (2021) discovered that most private and government employees scored high in authoritative parenting styles. In fact, most working mothers use an authoritative parenting style because they understand how important it is for their children's social development. Based on Baumrind’s theory, children whose parents use an authoritative style tend to have self-confidence regarding their capability of learning new things, fine socializing skills, the ability to control their feelings, and happy personality traits (Cherry, 2022).

Furthermore, the results showed that there is no relationship between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in Klang Valley. Similarly, Pangaribuan (2021) stated that their study indicates there is no significant connection between parenting styles and parents' stress in Indonesia. This result is unexpected since research by Matejevic and Dordevic (2019) discovered that there is a relationship between parenting style and the conflicting roles of working and parenting. Therefore, there are several factors that contribute to this result. In terms of theory, the working mothers in Klang Valley are experiencing eustress. In short, the Soewondo study's (as cited in Kusuma, 2018) stated that eustress is stress that is good or positive. This is where the stress is caused to accomplish a work task, and it will not have any negative side effects. That is why, even though they have a high work stress level, they did not project it through their parenting style. This indicates that the mothers have a good work-life balance. The result is also due to a different sample population, where Klang Valley working mothers experience different environmental factors that nurture them not to change their parenting style due to their work stress.

In addition, Chew et al. (2016) stated that their prediction of their unexpected finding might be due to Malaysian Chinese culture. This is where most Chinese mothers would rather work than take care of their children (Chew et al., 2016). As a result, the less time they are exposed to their child, the less they will experience parenting stress (Chew et al., 2016). So, since the mothers will be spending more time at work from morning until evening, their parenting stress will be reduced while their work stress might not be reduced. Therefore, that is why these mothers' parenting styles were not affected since working reduces parenting stress. According to the findings discussed by Chew et al. (2016), future research can explore the following areas to understand further the relationship between maternal employment, parenting stress, and work stress based on race. Another point of view is that working mothers are aware of the importance of parenting styles due to modernization. That is why most of them adopt an authoritative parenting style, as it has a great positive impact on children's social development. Therefore, based on this reason, they do not desire to change their parenting style, even though work-related environmental stress is influencing them.

In fact, as supported, Gursoy and Yildiz study's (as cited in Mase & Tyokyaa, 2016) have done a comparison of parental attitude perceptions among children whose mothers are working and not working; and discovered that the mothers' work status can significantly impact their children's parental perception, specifically the children's perception on how loving or punishing their parents are. So, the children whose mothers are working view their parents as less punishing and more loving compared to children whose mothers are not working (Mase & Tyokyaa, 2016). Therefore, this shows that working mothers tend to be more loving and less punitive to their children compared to non-working mothers. This indicates that mothers' work stress level does not impact their parenting style as they are strongly holding to authoritative parenting style.

As a result, there is no correlation between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in Klang Valley. In fact, each of the research questions and hypotheses has been addressed. Also, similar results and the possible causes have been explained to justify the findings.

## CONCLUSION

Working mothers in Malaysia are increasing due to economic reasons and family needs. They are struggling to fulfil work and family commitments as society expects them to manage both well. Due to job stressors, the mothers are experiencing work stress which will affect their parenting style. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the relationship between work stress level and parenting styles among working mothers in Klang Valley. The results showed that there is no relationship between work stress level and parenting styles. Therefore, work stress levels do not affect parenting styles. Studies show this is due to eustress, good work-life balance, different sample population, more time spent at work, awareness of parenting style, and work status. The study also discovered that most mothers scored high in work stress and authoritative parenting style.

Through this study, employers should be aware that working mothers are experiencing high stress and they should find out the factors of it in order to maintain their mental health; and avoid burnout and turnover. Future researchers are recommended to study further on the reasons why there is not a relationship between work stress and parenting style; and also research on this topic based on ethnicities.



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